

Re-engineering the Documentation Process: Doing More with Less to Keep Up with Increased Customer Needs

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For the past ten years, the Documentation Department at Hayes Microcomputer Products, Inc. has undergone numerous changes and evolutions—many to keep up with changing technology and market needs, many to accommodate organizational shifts and restructuring. This presentation sheds light on some of the innovative and creative ways the department has been reorganized and the dynamic documentation strategies that have been put into practice as a result.

NEW PARADIGMS, NEW ORGANIZATION

We will also discuss the new process, ongoing strengths and weaknesses, and continued recommendations for improvement. In this overview, we'll also share some of the specific tracking, planning, and development tools that have been created and put in place along the way to ensure our documentation meets our internal and external customers' needs.

EXPECTATIONS OF WRITERS

In general, the role of the technical writer is rapidly expanding. In the past, the technical writer was highly focused on writing print manuals. Today, technical writers play a role in interface design, market analysis, project management, cost analysis, and usability, and develop a wide range of products, from traditional print manuals to full multimedia applications. With this expanded function has also come demands for increased productivity and efficiency.

REALITY

In most companies, corporate downsizing has forced departments to support more products than ever before, with fewer people and in less time.

During a normal three-month period, technical writers at Hayes can be assigned anywhere from ten to twenty new projects, ranging in size from two to two-hundred pages. To deal with this situation, it is important for technical writers to be focused constantly on improvements to their process for planning, assimilating, and developing documentation. By honing the process, writers are able to increase efficiency, productivity, and overall quality while providing more services (such as usability testing and cost analysis) to our internal customers.

HISTORY

In our progression, we will discuss how the documentation process and the role of the technical writer have evolved over the past ten years. Our perspective will include an historical overview and a description of the evolution of the documentation process through six major department reorganizations.

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